

Week Two: Life is Repentance

Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ...willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance. - Martin Luther

OPENING PRAYER

READ | *1 John 1:1-2:2*

¹That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ²The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴We write this to make our joy complete.

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. ⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

⁸If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

¹My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ²He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

DISCUSS

1. What is the major hindrance to true fellowship with God and other people, according to verses 5-10? What are the claims John says people make to avoid facing this hindrance seriously?

[John discusses the effects of sin on our relationship with God and the various strategies people use to deal with their sin. His initial statement: "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all," is John's way of communicating that sin breaks fellowship with God. John also illustrates the different excuses and strategies used to avoid facing our sinfulness seriously. Three options: we either deny we have any significant sin, deny that it affects our relationship with God, or we acknowledge it and confess it. All attempts to justify our behavior or deny it are ultimately self-defeating, for they keep us from the one thing that can bring fulfillment: confession and repentance, in which God makes known his love for us.]

2. If according to Scripture there is no condemnation in Christ (Romans 8:1) and our guilt has been removed (Hebrews 10:22), then why does our sin still get in the way?

[A person might ask, "Does what John is saying mean that when I sin, God no longer loves me? If my sin—past, present, and future—is forgiven on the basis of what Christ has done in history, and my standing with God is secure, then how am I to view my present sin, which breaks my fellowship with God?" We need to recognize the distinction between our legal and personal relationship with God. Legally, we stand completely acceptable to God, being clothed in Christ's righteousness. Through Jesus, we are viewed as innocent and completely without guilt. However, there is not only a legal relationship, but also a personal relationship. It is in that personal relationship that fellowship can be broken.]

APPLY

Intro: It is important to consider how the gospel affects and transforms the act of repentance. In 'religion'¹ our only hope is to live a good enough life for God to bless us. So in 'religion' the purpose of repentance is basically to keep God happy so he will continue to bless you and answer your prayers. This means 'religious repentance' is a) selfish, b) self-righteous, and c) ultimately hardens our hearts toward God. In 'religion' we are only sorry for sin because of its consequences to us. We repent to avoid punishment. But the gospel tells us that sin can't ultimately bring us into condemnation (Romans 8:1). The issue, then, is what sin does to God—it displeases and dishonors him—and to our relationship with him—it strains or fractures it. So in 'religion', repentance is self-

¹ The pursuit of personal righteousness and/or salvation by means other than the historic Christian grace-based gospel of Jesus Christ.

centered; the gospel makes it God-centered. In 'religion' we are sorry for the consequences of sin, but in the gospel we are sorry for the sin itself. The more you see your own flaws and sins, the more precious, electrifying, and amazing God's grace appears to you. But on the other hand, the more aware you are of God's grace and your acceptance in Christ, the more you are able to drop your denials and self-defenses and admit the true dimensions of your sin. The sin under all other sins is a lack of joy in Christ.

1. Describe gospel-repentance in your own words. Why does the gospel create a radical new dynamic for personal growth through repentance?
2. Have you ever said to yourself (in one form or another) that in order to repent properly, "I basically have to beat myself up over my sin and convince God (and myself) that I am so genuinely miserable and regretful that I deserve to be forgiven"? Let's look at the gospel alternative: Why do we *not* have to make ourselves suffer in order to merit forgiveness (hint: v.9)?
[In the gospel, we know that Jesus suffered and was miserable for our sin. So we simply receive the forgiveness earned by Christ. I John 1:9 says that God forgives us because he is just. It would be unjust of God to ever deny us forgiveness, because Jesus earned our acceptance. In 'religion' we earn our forgiveness with our repentance, but in the gospel we just receive it.]
3. Take a few minutes for everyone to read any two of the models of gospel-repentance on the next page. Allow this to direct the group's closing prayer, sharing and then praying for specific ways your experience of repentance can grow.

CLOSING PRAYER

Prayer suggestions: > See Apply question 3.

Here are some models of gospel-repentance that will enable you to profit greatly from a regular and sharpening discipline of self-examination and repentance.ⁱ

Deep humility (vs. pride)

Ask: Have I looked down on anyone? Have I been too stung by criticism? Have I felt snubbed and ignored?

Repent this way: Consider the free grace of Jesus until I sense a) decreasing disdain (since I am a sinner too) and b) decreasing pain over criticism (since I should not value human approval over God's love). In light of his grace I can let go of the need to keep up a good image--it is too great a burden and now unnecessary. Consider free grace until I experience grateful, restful joy.

Abiding love (vs. indifference)

Ask: Have I spoken unkindly of anyone? Am I justifying myself by caricaturing (in my mind) someone else? Have I been impatient and irritable? Have I been self-absorbed and indifferent and inattentive to people?

Repent this way: Consider the free grace of Jesus until there is a) no coldness or unkindness (think of the sacrificial love of Christ for you), b) no impatience (think of his patience with you), and c) no indifference. Consider free grace until I show warmth and affection. God was infinitely patient and attentive to me, out of grace.

Wise courage (vs. anxiety)

Ask: Have I avoided people or tasks that I know I should face? Have I been anxious and worried? Have I failed to be circumspect or have I been rash and impulsive?

Repent this way: Consider the free grace of Jesus until there is a) no cowardly avoidance of hard things (since Jesus faced evil for me) and b) no anxious or rash behavior (since Jesus' death proves God cares and will watch over me). It takes pride to be anxious--I am not wise enough to know how my life should go. Consider free grace until I experience calm thoughtfulness and strategic boldness.

Godly motivations

Ask: Am I doing what I am doing for God's glory and the good of others or am I being driven by fears, need for approval, love of comfort and ease, need for control, hunger for acclaim and power, or the 'fear of man'? Am I looking at anyone with envy? Am I giving in to any of even the first motions of lust or gluttony? Am I spending my time on urgent things rather than important things, because of these inordinate desires?

Repent this way: How does Jesus provide for me what I am looking for in these other things? Pray: "O Lord Jesus, make me content enough in you to avoid sin and wise enough in you to avoid danger, that I may always do what is right in your sight, in your name I pray, Amen."



ⁱ Adapted from "All of Life is Repentance" by Tim Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, NYC